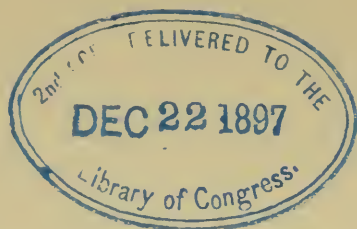


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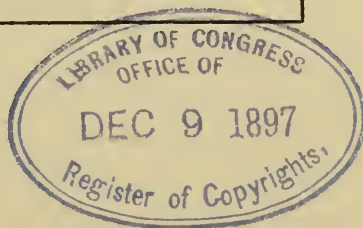
A COLLECTION OF VERSE

3 new lines
By BENJAMIN SLEDD



G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
New York and London
The Knickerbocker Press
1897

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BENJAMIN SLEDD

The Knickerbocker Press, New York

PRELUDE

OCTOBER 6, 1892.

Tu se' lo mio maestro e lo mio autore.—*L'Inferno*, I., 85.

All night I moved about the silent house,
In grief for one whom I had never known,—
Dying beyond the sea. And in the dawn
Methought I heard far off a phantom bell
Ring out one startled, broken peal of woe ;
And, linking voice in voice, bell after bell
Bore on the wailing through the darkened land,
And many a heart that watched and grieved with mine,
Made answer : “ He is gone,—the last, the best ! ”

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A BALLAD OF OTTER HILL.

YOU doubt it ? Pause here a moment then,
Where the pathway shuns yon black-lipped
glen.

Listen, it comes at last !

You hear how fierce and fast

The trampling of hoofs on the flinty hill ?

And the moonlight seems to darken and die

As the phantom sound comes swiftly nigh.

'T is gone ! And all is strangely still.

'T was only the wind in the trees, you say ?

And the clouds that caught the moonlight away ?

Then stay and see it return. What, nay ?

The story ? I heard it long ago,

When the kitchen hearthstone's cheery glow

Made fearful shapes on the dusky walls ;

And the chimney's throat, so deep and wide,

Seemed the very place for ghosts to hide,—

The wandering souls of the hapless dead,

Of step-dames, murderers, misers, and all
To whom, as fireside fablers said,
The rest of the grave had been denied;
And the weird, shrill sound too well we knew,
When over the chimney the north wind blew,
And their furious revels the witches plied—
Dark legend of a vanished race,
Like their rock-carved pictures quaint and slim,
Which still the curious eye can trace,
But the heedless years have worn so dim
That fancy alone must blindly spell
The fateful story they once could tell.

It tells of a daring youth who came
Following—was it?—visions of fame;
Or was his quest but some far place
To hide him from his name and race?

A stranger game love never played,
When it led the youth in the wilds astray,
Yet brought him safe—love's wonted way—
To a chieftain's door at close of day,
And showed to his wondering gaze a maid,
Whose charms, like a rose in its opening stayed,
Her guiltless garb too well betrayed,

And her virgin veil of dusky hair,
Around her shoulders brown and bare,
Like clouds over sunset skies.
And she gazed upon love's errant knight
With a gentle welcome in her eyes,
Which shone more deeply, darkly, bright
Than waters shadowed by rock and hill,
When the moon is full and the winds are still.
His quest, whate'er it be, was won,
And his own and the maiden's heart undone.

What though love's plea her sire denied,
And claimed another the maid as bride ?
For mountain streams in the valley unite
Though many a barrier lies between,
And many a cruel shattering height;
And two young hearts and love can defeat
The wiles of a score of sires, I ween.
Where vine and branch in a bower grew,
With murmur of waters low and sweet,
Nightly would youth and maiden meet
And fondly their secret vows renew;
With none to behold save night's dim eye,
And none to betray save the blind wind's sigh,
Or the voice of the brook that murmured by.

The fatal night was fair as this,
When fancy strives with visions of bliss
To soothe the restless, passionate heart;
And nature, too, does well her part,
With the star of eve and of love just now
Quivering there on Otter's brow
Like an angel new-alighted;
In such an hour the lover sits
At trysting-place in the deep, lone wood,
But may not shape to the hour his mood.
He shudders and starts when a shadow flits
And the moonlight is suddenly blighted;
And he keenly hears how the north-winds go
With stealthy, shivering tread,
Where summer's leaves lie strewn below—
Rude spoilers amid the vanquished dead.
Nor may he banish from overhead
The strange bird uttering wail on wail,
As striving to tell some warning tale;
And his heart beats fast with nameless dread,
When his steed comes whinnying to his side
With mane erect and nostrils wide.

In tremulous haste he strives to wake
The dying fire's uncertain glow;

The fitful, wavering light upsprings
And mocking shapes on the darkness flings
Which swiftly, silently come and go,
And horror more hideous make.
Vainly the light he urges higher:
The shadow-phantoms scant retire,
And grimly expectant wait;
Or vengeful, direr forms they take,
And vampire-wings above him shake,
Like the gathering vultures of fate.

Did someone call from the glen below ?
Well does his ear love's signal know,
Though strange and boding the tone it takes
His heart leaps up in a joyful cry,
When, swift as the startled hind can fly,
The maiden through the darkness breaks,
With outstretched arms and streaming hair,
And lips that faint with the woe they bear.

But fierce, far shouts tell the needless tale,
Like the swift, exultant cry
Of ravening wolves on the traveller's trail.
“ They come,” she whispers; “ fly! ”

Away, away, through the night they go!
Brave is the youth and bravely can ride,
And he clasps the faithful maid to his side;
But cruel arms the trees bend low
To stay the lovers in their flight;
The guiding moon lends treacherous light,
The chasm's mouth gapes deep and wide,
And the blind, still depths of the marshes wait;
While, uttering still its boding wail,
Ever above does the strange bird sail,
The falcon of pursuing fate.

The faltering lips of the housewives fail,
To tell of the piteous sight
That earth and heaven beheld that night.
Here, after twice a hundred years,
Like a fearful moral to the tale,
Must phantom lover and phantom bride
Nightly their fruitless race still ride—
Hush! see, again it appears!

MATER LACHRYMARUM.

WHAT time has been I may not know,
Since first I heard it, long ago,—
A sound of weeping in the night:
A woman's voice, and in such grief
That weeping might not bring relief,
Nor solace come with day's sweet light.

And often now I wake,
When night and silence make
Of things familiar what they will:
The cricket's noisy mirth
Breaks, falters, and is still;
While waits in breathless dread the earth,
Expectant of some horror's birth.
Then in the darkness near
That sound again I hear.
A mother's voice were not more sad and wild,
Weeping and pleading for her fallen child.

And in my heart I know
What means this mystic voice of woe.

JUNE SHADOWS.

WHY, love, when wandering clouds
The sun for a moment conceal,
O'er the sunlight of thine eyes
Will a shade of sadness steal ?

For, see, how the landscape brightens,
As the shadows eastward fly;
And the sunshine, swiftly pursuing,
Goes racing merrily by.

Fresher the green of June
For the quickening moment of shade;
And brighter, too, are thine eyes
For the sadness that it made.

ELDRED.

MID a lone plain, far by the Northern seas,
Rises a low gray mound of heathen days.
An oak leans from above its storm-writhen bulk,
Grappling the stones with dragon coil of roots;
Beneath, a fountain once made the place sweet
To man and beast; and Skalds tell in their lore,
That He, the all-wise Sire of gods and men,
On errands earthward bent, in mortal guise,
Made here his resting-place a twilight hour,
And parting, left a writing on the stone,
In runes whereof no seer the meaning knew;
And sacred was the spot henceforward held.
But now the sedge sighs drearily in the cleft
Whose harsh, dead lips the fountain blessed of old.

So runs the story in the grim old tongue:
Wolfram the chief, from warring in the South,
Came bringing spoil of arms and treasure home,
And many a captive maid goodly to see,

But strange to the rude North—dark-haired, dark-eyed,
And slender-limbed, and soft-voiced as the wind
That brings the sun again. And one there was
Comely above the rest, where all were fair.
Her Wolfram wooed, making her bondage sweet
With service that forewent all other care;
Nor godlike Eldred, sprung from Woden's race,
Yet skilled in all a woman's subtle ways,
Could win again the love that once was hers.

And Eldred, when she saw her love despised,
Forsook the ways of men and passed her days
Within the shadow of Woden's sacred tree:
Motionless, voiceless, would she sit all day.
And maids who came to draw at Woden's well,
Wondered and feared, to see strange shadowy forms
Beneath the waters move, and hear strange sounds
As of a mourning voice 'mid the dark boughs.

And Wolfram and his warriors fell away
From the old faith, lured by their alien wives,
And led the folk to worship that strange god
Whose symbol is the cross. And impious hands,
Eager to prove their zeal in faith new-found,

Profaned and overwhelmed that ancient shrine;
And perished, too, had Woden's sacred tree
But for the maid who Norn-like sat beneath,
A light upon her face that none could brave.

And on a day came from the sea a cloud,
Like some vast creature of the primal deeps,
Rolling its formless bulk among the hills
And blasting with its breath forest and field.
In burning folds it wrapped the recreant land
And hid the sun and made at noon deep night.
Then rose from ruined shrine and sacred tree
Lamentings in the gloom, as of a folk
Who go from kin and land, and come no more.
And when the cloud, in one deep thunder-peal,
Had passed on high, with sounds of mourning still,
Eldred lay dead beneath the stricken tree.

A BALLAD OF MERRIWAY PLACE.

F AIR Merriway Place stood long ago,
Where now yon ghostly pillars stand,
Each pointing a warning skeleton hand,
Like a sign of death in a stricken land.
Around, the trees are still a-row,
For only the wandering kine invade
The confines of their haunted shade.

Was ever a story of shame forgot ?
One lingers yet about this spot,—
The old, old story of love and pain,
That hardly need be told again—
So often told; yet add but a line,
And, lo, the story is new, and divine.

'T is noon of a lovely summer night:
Slow veiling her calm, unpassioned light,
Like a seraph sheathing his radiant wings,
The dying moon to the hill-top clings.

Below, two steeds for their riders wait;
Two lovers have met at the fateful gate;
Their lips are pressed in a rapturous kiss,
Which in fancy alone were lifelong bliss,
And their hearts are met in a glad embrace—
What shadow starts from its secret place ?
A moment more, and alone she stands,
With her lover's life-blood warm on her hands
And his kiss yet warm on her lips and face.

As calls the witless, startled lamb
To its unheeding stricken dam,
So piteously the maiden calls,
Then prone on his corse she falls.

Gently, sadly, they bear her in;
Nor the hand of skill nor of love may win
The life again to the fair young breast.
And they bury her deep, but she may not rest;
Passionate, young—was this her sin ?
And every night, when the hour commands,
At the fatal spot the maiden stands,
With the woeful signs on her robe and her hands.

THE LITTLE PEOPLE OF THE HILLS.

I.

THE Briton found them when he came,
A meagre race of pigmy things
That scarce deserved the human name;
First strange outpourings of life's springs,
Or wavelet from some primal tide
That failed, nor left a trace beside
Whate'er this hill's blind womb may hide.

A wondrous folk, the legends say,
Whose dwelling-place was cave and rock;
Whose only care was herd and flock—
Strange creatures, nameless, too, as they.
What need had they of warrior might
Who held in thrall the powers of night?
The watchful hills had girt them round
With circles of enchanted ground;
The waters, too, obeyed their charms;
And where yon sullen river crawls

Guarding the valley's northward walls,
Ever a warning voice still calls,
And round dark rocks flash angry teeth,
And rise a hundred gleaming arms
To drag their luckless prey beneath.

Within the bosom of the hill
The Little People wander still.
Listen, beside this sunless cave
You hear but hidden waters rave !
Yet when the moonless nights are come,
And every sound of day is dumb,
The cave is aglow with pale blue light,
The slopes with ghostly shapes are white;
And when shrill music floats this way,
The children hear and shuddering say,
“ The Little People are at play,
And feed their flocks on the hills to-night.’

II.

’T is the hour before the hour of day,
When lingering witch and ghost and sprite—
All things that tend on death and night,
Their strongest spells on mortals lay.

Are these the hurrying forms of men,
Or shades that seek their graves again ?
The night-bird flits with boding scream,
And witch-light waves beside the stream,
And winds like fiends are laughing low;
For well do the powers of darkness know
These kindred souls, who make Christ's name
The watchword to their deeds of shame.
Swiftly and silently they go,
As if they fear the morrow's sun
May see their purpose still undone.

III.

What make the Little Folk to-night ?
Their altars gleam with spectral light,
And round and round the sacred spring
With slow and rhythmic pace they go.
Olden, forgotten songs they sing,
Which once could sway to their subtle might
All things whate'er of air and earth;
And those wild, sweet sounds the waters yet know,
For, lo, a living conscious thing,
The fountain stirs from its place below,
And rises and falls to the solemn mirth.

But the winds have shrieked their shrill alarms,
And startled cliff and cave repeat
The vengeful trampling of armed feet
And furious shout and clang of arms.
Vain, vain, the might of magic word
And woven circle of heathen charms
Against the cross-engravèd sword!
Gone is the light from cave and hill,
The sacred spring lies dark and still,
And swiftly as by some wizard hand,
The revellers all are rapt away.

In the dim, sad light of dawning day,
Silent in wonder, the pilgrims stand,
Each grasping hard his needless brand,
And many a silent prayer they say,
To sanctify the spell-curst land.

Darkly the depths of the cavern yawn,
Dark, yet aglow, like a demon's eye;
And the folds of its demon might seem drawn
About their feet, that are fain to fly;
While, leagued with the menacing gloom within,
Waters are rousing with ravening din.

“ The mouth of hell receives its own,
As the serpent-mother her slimy brood,”
Their leader cried, in sullen mood
Dashing his blade on the altar-stone,
Which still with ghostly glimmerings shone.
“ Well may it hide what it can not save!
Up, men, and do the Master’s will!
See, willing stones wait on the hill
Their holy purpose to fulfill.
This cave must be the heathen’s grave.”

What is it to their chief they bring?
A babe by loving mother left,
Safe cradled in a secret cleft?
Or is it some wee, shuddering thing
Born of that race which, poets claim,
Possessed the earth ere mortals came?
And still are seen by lonely ways
Weaving their midnight roundelays.

No mortal mother’s babe is this!
As fragile as if yestermorn
Had seen its slender life unborn;
And yet its age as well might be
An hour—a year—a century.
No fear it has; yet in its eyes

Is something wilder than surprise;
And in its voice, so faint and thin,
Is something yet more wild and strange,
Beyond the human voice's range,
That marks it of no mortal kin.
As subtle now as serpent's hiss,
Now sweet as chirp of dreaming bird
At midnight, in lone woodlands heard.

"Christ claims this being for his own,"
Their leader said. "To him be praise!
One heathen trained in holy ways
For all here hidden may atone."

IV.

The pilgrims have worked on the land their will.
The waters of the sacred spring,
Like captive maidens who toil, and sing
With freedom's olden sweetness still,
Go murmuring down to an impious mill;
And every hour a holy bell
Scatters each lingering heathen spell.
The pitiless stones, piled heap on heap,
Faithful their ghastly secret keep.

She lives, the child so strange and slight,
Now into something stranger grown.
She comes and goes like an errant light
Whose baseless being owns no cause,
Whose motions mock at nature's laws.
No human comrade has she known:
With dumb, wild things is all her play,
Till the wildest know her voice and way,
And the fiercest love her subtle sway.
With brook and bird, with flower and tree,
And what no mortal eye may see,
Ever she parleys mysteriously.
Nay, gossips whisper that all night
She leads the revels of witch and sprite.
Nothing she fears save the human face,
And the churchyard's holy, silent place.
To hear her voice so eerily shrill
Cleaving the twilight's solemn still,
The woodman quickens his careless pace,
And hushes his often-mumbled hymn,
While all around grows strangely dim.
And the shepherd knows where her footsteps pass,
By the dewdrops brushed from the unbent grass;
But to his clouded eye and mind,
The darkened path she leaves behind

Across the morning meadows sheen,
Hath a meaning unholy as unkind.
Seek no field where her feet have been,
Though its grass be never so sweet and green!

At dusk she leaves her curious play,
As if some spirit spake her name:
“ ’Tis the winds that call me,” she will say.
In vain does the clamoring housewife blame;
The little maiden flits on her way,
But turns, and lingers, and looks behind,
As though she would not be unkind,
Yet knows she may not longer stay.

Night’s gathering shades delay her not,
But straight she flies to the lonely spot
Where murmurs darkling the sacred spring,
With a sad, mysterious sound,
To the still gray stones that gird it round.
And its waters leap up, like a conscious thing,
To welcome her: by its brink she sits,
Singing low songs, whose sweetness fits
Like words to the tune the dark waters sing;
And higher, higher those waters leap,
And gather aloft in a wavering heap,

Which glows and burns with phantom light,
Yet lends no brightness to the night:
As when a late moon's sullen glow
Makes gloomier Otter's pines below.

By many a fireside still they tell
What wonders on a night befell;
How mothers in their slumber stirred,
Dreaming of something dimly heard—
A cry through the darkness—a far, glad sound,
Like a mother's cry when her lost one's found.
And hunters left their quest that night
To watch far off an awesome sight:
Clouds wrapped the fateful spot around,
And sounds came from the hill's rent breast;
Yet anear was all in breathless rest:
No flutter of leaves in the moon's full glow,
No murmur of brook in the vale below.
What mystery would the morrow show ?

The valley waits for the brook in vain,
Nor ever the maiden came again.

UNITED.

I.

ALL day it shook the land—grim battle's thunder tread;
And fields at morning green, at eve are trampled red.
But now, on the stricken scene, twilight and quiet fall;
Only, from hill to hill, night's tremulous voices call;
And comes from far along, where campfires warning burn,
The dread, hushed sound which tells of morning's sad return.

II.

Timidly nature awakens; the stars come out overhead,
And a flood of moonlight breaks like a voiceless prayer for the dead.

And steals the blessed wind, like Odin's fairest
daughter,
In viewless ministry, over the fields of slaughter;
Soothing the smitten life, easing the pang of death,
And bearing away on high the passing warrior's
breath.

III.

Two youthful forms are lying apart from the thickest
fray,
The one in Northern blue, the other in Southern
gray.
Around his lifeless foeman the arms of each are
pressed,
And the head of one is pillowed upon the other's
breast.
As if two loving brothers, wearied with work and
play,
Had fallen asleep together, at close of the summer
day.
Foemen were they, and brothers?—Again the
battle's din,
With its sullen, cruel answer, from far away breaks
in.

IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW.

NO life was there in that lone land:
Or only lived the shuddering sand,
Blind, hungry thing,
Which round my helpless feet would cling
And strive to clasp me fast
In its cold arms. There was no light,
And yet I felt that height on height
Shut in the dead black vast.

Weary, I might not rest nor pause,
With desolation's mighty jaws
Gaping behind, and in my hair
And on my neck its strange chill breath.
I wept, and murmured, "Better death!"
Nor heard my voice in that mute air.

Then came sweet thoughts of other life
That I had lived—its grief and strife
Now all forgot; as present woe
Makes joy of sorrow long ago.

Still on, with hopeless steps, I went:
Past was the plain, and downward bent
The unseen way. As seamen hear,—
And hearing, thrill with formless fear,—
The midnight waves on unknown shore;
So, ever growing more and more,
Deep, dolorous sounds I heard draw near,
And knew the illimitable sea
Which One had said the end must be.

Now came from where the dawn had been
A light that hardly might be seen,
So vast the void between.
One needless glance behind I cast
To measure horrors past;
Then sea and night were everywhere.
The sightless waters, chill and bare,
Folded me round—no stay was there;
They did but serve the mystic will
That bore me on unwilling still,—
The waters moving with low din,
As from another life within.

Awake I was, yet waking dreamed.
I knew the guiding wave still streamed
Beneath, and shades still closed me round,

Yet heard a promised dawn's far sound,
And felt sweet promises of light.
Then unremembered was the night,
The plain, the sea; as summer's green
Makes doubt that winter e'er has been.
Strong arms were stretched to clasp and save:
I saw beneath a new-made grave,
And heard a gentle whispered breath,
"Thy life begins, which men call death."

THE MOTHER.

WILL they not leave me in peace?—Yes, dear,
I am coming soon.
What need of winter's presence at rose-crowned
rites of June?

He brings her home in triumph, the sweet young
life he has won;
And I could rejoice in a daughter, had I not lost a
son.

Long since God took my others, and now I am left
alone;
For, though I am still his mother, the wife will
claim her own.

How cold to-night was his greeting! He called me
simply "mother;"
Those old sweet names of endearment so soon he
gives to another.

Oh for one hour of the nights when he sat by the
hearth and read,
And 't was to his voice I listened, and not what
the dull books said.

And often I 'd fall to weeping—and yet I knew
not why;
But then we older children must have our meaning-
less cry.

A moment of silence and weeping, and then my
tears have done:
May I, who have wept for nothing, not weep for
the loss of a son ?

But why is my loss so bitter ? 'T is what all
mothers have known;
For, though we still are mothers, we may not claim
our own.

ALICE.

AGAIN I walk the dim, secluded ways
Which once were learned so well that memory
now

Scarce needs to guide my habit-prompted steps.
Each object tells some half-forgotten tale
From childhood's long-closed book—the dwarfish
oaks,

Where still at noon the dozing cattle rest;
The fields of broom, the changeless laurel hedge,
And there upon the hill's prone slope below,
The pines that call me still with whisperings sweet,
Telling of glossy carpet spread beneath.
The beech, scarred with three generations' names,
Whereon I carved another's name with mine,
Shows faithful yet our childish pledge of love;
And here beneath this oak I made for her
A mimic palace from the laurel boughs,
And on a mossy throne I placed her queen,
And crowned her with the autumn's golden leaves.

Two children of two neighbor country homes,
Our love began in those far, fateful years
Whereof faint memories come to me now
Like fragments of a half-forgotten dream,
Or dim suggestions of a life ere this.

For life before as shadows seemed to me,
A sad, strange child to whom each night would
 come

A vision, such as new-born fancy, freed
From grosser senses, can alone create.

At first, the shadow of a dream it came,
Like clouds that fade ere we can mark their
 place:

To-day I waked with blissful memories
Of eyes that smiled a moment on my sleep;
To-morrow, 't was the gleam of golden hair,
And then the warm, sweet touch of little hands.
All timidly, it was, she came to me,
A presence that I rather felt than knew—
Faint flushings on my slowly dawning dream—
Till, last, her perfect image on me shone.
Radiant and blushing to my side she drew,
My dream-love, veiled in clouds of golden hair;
And on her brow the tender light of eyes

Whose fresh-created beauty haunts me now
Like the lost glory of a summer dawn.

At once I loved the being of my dreams,
And for her coming anxiously would wait,
Or call to her aloud if she delayed;
And hand in hand, we wandered through that world
Which opens freely to the pure young life,
But closes on our later, sadder years.

No word she spoke, yet ruled me with her eyes,
Dark eyes from whose mysterious depths of light
Night-long my soul would drink entrancing joy;
And once I clasped her wildly to my breast,
And pressed long, breathless kisses on her lips
Which clinging gave my kisses back more sweet,
As roses the caresses of the wind;
Then from my arms with startled eyes she fled.
Pleading, I strove to follow; and awoke
To find a mother's hand upon my brow.
I wept and chid her for my broken dream.

My dream-love came no more to bless my sleep:
My passion had destroyed the beautiful world,
Which, try howe'er, I could not re-create;

My slumbers filled all night with wanderings
Led on by glimpses of my fleeing love.
And yet I felt she ruled my day-dreams still,
A viewless presence ever at my side.

I scorned and shunned the heartless, jeering world,
To pass whole days far in the lonely woods—
For who so fearless as the love-lorn youth ?
Sometimes, bright eyes would watch from leafy
covert;

Or fancy half-persuade she waited me
In some lone glen; in restless forest pools
A moment would her image wavering lie,
Or flash her golden hair on sunset glades;
And once great fear came over me, and I fled,—
Startled, like one surprised in guilty thoughts,
To hear the mighty silence breathe my name.

Autumn and school-time came to break the spell.
I loathed the schoolroom and its buzzing swarm,
As heart-sick men the clamoring market-place.
The sky had never seemed so beautiful
As when in one mean, narrow window framed.
Now would fantastic boats go sailing by,
With elfin people filled who beckoned me;

And some there were who mocked me, prison-bound.

Now flocks of sheep went wandering in blue fields;
Or mighty beasts would stalk majestic past,
Pursued by hunters on wild, airy steeds.

Never had sunlight seemed so wonderful
As when a ray stole trembling through the roof,
And glided, spirit-like, down the dark room,
Hovering upon my useless, half-closed book,—
A little world that teemed with restless life.

Outside, how merrily would the cricket sing,
As if the knave were drunk with sun and air,
Which stupid tyranny denied to me!

The birds would twit me with their liberty;
And far across the fields, the low of herds,
And cheery songs of those who reaped the maize,
Filled heart and eyes with bitter, nameless grief.
The presence, too, that cheered me morn and eve,
Along the way, fled at the prison door

One morn, as here beside the way I sat,
Suffering, before, the tortures of the day,
I heard a voice part breathe, part speak, my
name—

So low, so sweet it was, almost I feared

To lift my eyes, lest I should find her not,
The maiden of my dreams, whose voice it seemed.

If one who muses far into the night,
Shaping the likeness of his unknown wife,
Should suddenly behold step from the wall—
In faultless personation of his thoughts—
A common picture of earth-common maid,
Which he ne'er looked upon except to scorn,—
His wonder were not greater than was mine,
To see transformed as I beheld her then,
The slender girl who shared my seat each day.

Was it the morning, which had touched her cheeks
With deeper crimson, or the wind, which blew
Her hair about her face? It came and went,
As in a stranger's face, we know not how,
A moment will familiar likeness flash,
Only in something all unknown to pass.

“ Oh, Alice,” part in anger, all in grief I cried,
“ I thought that you were she I told you of,—
You seemed so like! And yet how could it be ? ”
I added, scanning her dark hair and eyes.
“ You are like people of this world, and she——”

My voice broke down in bitter, angry tears.
But Alice glided softly to my side,
All sympathy and whispered, "Let it be,
And fancy I am she, just for to-day."

How swiftly fled the morn! The buzzing swarm,
The small, dark room, the great bright world
without,
Were all forgotten in my new-found joy,
And playtime seemed for once scarce long enough.
Beneath this oak, we wrought the laurel boughs
Into an emerald palace, paved with gold
Won from the treasures of the willing woods;
And on a mossy throne was Alice queen,
Crowned with a golden crown that autumn gave.

I loved her from that day, yet knew it not;
And through the long, unnumbered years, my life,
Warmed in the fruitful sunshine of her eyes,
Was surely gathering fragrance, form, and hue,
To bear at last love's passion-perfect flower.

Again she comes, a wife and mother now,
To waken me from dreams, as long ago.

For her the world of fancy was not made;
Reality she finds too beautiful,
And simple household joys too sure and sweet,
To crave the poet's rare, unreal bliss.
She moves by quiet, unpretending ways,
Yet leading ever to those calm, far heights
Whither the generous soul instinctive strives.

EPITHALAMION.

I N that strange hour when day and night
Rule nature with divided might,
And with their mutual powers meet
To make the dreamer's bliss complete,
I dreamed we fared—and thou, my wife—
At dawn through lands unknown to life,
A sunward-going stream our guide
'Mid valleys measured, dim and wide,
By many a fateful height untried.

Sweet murmurs, as of woods and rills,
Came from the shadow-mantled hills;
And sweeter sounds were in the air
Which had their source we knew not where.

Swift from the twilight's quickening gray
Was wrought the miracle of day:
We heard the many-voiced earth
Proclaim the wonder's birth,

And saw the waters leap to meet
The morning's silver-silent feet.
Then was the dawn to me as nought,
Though in my heart unfelt it wrought:
I could but gaze on thee.
From rosy cloud the wind would bow
And lift thy locks and kiss thy brow,
And fold thee in his blind embrace,
Revealing all thy tender grace.
But thou didst turn on me
The gentle pleading of thine eyes,
And straight each ruder passion dies
And wakens in me strength of will
Love's nobler purpose to fulfill.

And urged by love's sweet guiding might,
Through dawning lands we passed away,
Our faces turned to one glad height
Which crowned with purest splendor lay;
And on our brows a purer light
Than harbingers earth's fairest day.

FAME'S VOTARY.

TO come, with weary, bleeding feet,
And vainly at fame's portal beat—
Better the day of sweat and dust,
With evening's gain of cup and crust!

INSOMNIA.

WOULDST know the saddest of sad things?
It is with sleepless eyes to lie
Watching the weary hours go by;
Till weariness impatient waits,—
Beside day's grim unopened gates,—
For all the untried morrow brings.

THE BROKEN STILE.

LINGERING beside the broken stile,
In April's virgin light they stand
And on his jacket's rough, brown sleeve
Rests a small, pleading hand.

A word in jest, love's old fond test,—
A maiden's fancy who may know ?
But now with tearful voice she begs,
“ You would not leave me so ? ”

All nature stays her busy hand
And owns awhile love's sovereign will:
From hedge-top mating birds look down,
Silent with straw in bill.

The sunbeams cease their merry dance,
The very breezes will not blow,
And pausing listen while she pleads,
“ You would not leave me so ? ”

Now sunbeams dance, birds build and sing,--
Of love's sweet triumph all things tell;
As hand in hand they climb the stile,
Winds whisper, "It is well!"

Alone beside the broken stile,
In autumn's sobbing rain I stand,
And through the parting mists of years
Stretches a pleading hand.

And at my side a phantom voice
Murmurs as in the long ago—
The voice of one now dead to me—
"You would not leave me so?"

IN WISH-NOT WOOD.

WILDERED in well-known ways he stands:
Round him the wood lies lifeless and gray,
Ghostly trunks stretch skeleton hands
Hanging dark horrors along the way.

Swiftly the spectral mist-shapes glide,
Twining their arms round the forest-head;
Faintly stealing, half-heard, at his side,
Viewless feet on the dank leaves tread.

Mighty pinions are hovering near,
Deeper the gloom of night is made;
Strange, wild voices breathe at his ear,
Strange, cold hands on his are laid.

Pale, pale light gleams chilly between
Ranged portals and columns grand,—
Shadows they seem of things unseen,
Shadows caught in the mist's great hand.

Stranger than wizard eye hath seen,
Wilder than wizard thought e'er planned—
Spaces of still, pale light between
Bodies that yield no touch to the hand.

Dimly floats up on the shuddering air
Music by eerie voices sung,—
Eerie voices chanting there
Music of earth when earth was young.

Shadowy worshippers bending wait,—
Altars with lurid light aflame,—
Kneeling to priests in awesome state—
Wildly he breathes God's holy name!

Darkness and storm rush over him;
Rent is the womb of night in twain;
Wailing wraiths through the woodland swim,
Fading at morn into ghastly rain.

Only the trees—mute, mantled, and gray—
Stand where the night's weird vision stood;
Wildly staring, a corse long lay
Sepulchreless in Wish-not Wood.

TWO SHADOWS.

I.

MY lady's window! See, those slender rays
Steal tremulous across upon my wall,
And through the wind-tossed vines make wanton
shapes

That come and go, mute messengers of love.
Oh, blessed sight! Her lattice wide she flings
And o'er the blind wall's crouching shadow bends,
As when, from bosom of deep-folded clouds,
The moon looks brightly forth. But she is gone.
Strange, strange! Can it be she that glides among
The broken shadows of the balcony,
Which, brightening, toward her white robes seem
to fly,

Swift as the eager clouds to meet the moon?
Did someone softly call? What cringing shape
Moves stealthily over the moonlit court?
That Spaniard!—Wait, my swelling heart, and see.

II.

This is the bridge, the river dark below,
But not so dark as in my dream it seemed.
How lifelike was that dream! Methought I saw
Two shadows lip to lip, and one was hers;
And then beneath St. Luke's I plucked the flowers,
And pressed their cooling sweetness to my brow—
What mean these rose leaves crushed within my
hand?

Could it have been no dream? and all I saw?—
I will not think of it, but watch the play
Of cloud and sky and stream; and hear, how sweet
Comes from below, the boatman's broken song,
With oft-repeated words, "wave," "moonlight,"
'love.'

Sing on, sing on, and mayst thou never know
How vain are all things else, where love is not.
Can never earth and heaven be fair again?
Is all their brightness gone with two dark eyes?
And all their sweetness with one little mouth?
Which even now is pressed to his seared lips
A moment since warm on a wanton's cheek.

And yet I may not die—I am so young.

They say the self-slain soul can find no rest,
Even in the grave, but wandering here, must fill
The measure of its destined mortal life.
And what if mine should be condemned to dwell
Beside her—see and know their mutual joys! . . .

THE MYSTERY OF THE WOODS.

VAGUER it seems than a vision
 Dreamed in an hour unknown,—
A grave with pines overshadowed,
 And strange wild life overgrown.

The first of earth's dark secrets
 By curious childhood found,
Much did I wonder what meaning
 Lay hid in that little mound.

And once—still must I remember
 The dreary autumn day—
All trembling with nameless terror,
 I ceased from childish play,

Saying, "Death—what is it, mother?"
 Sadly she made reply,
Clasping her arms about me:
 "Thou 'lt find out by and by."

But life's first perfect gladness,
I never felt it more,
Nor ever again was the sunshine
So sweet as it was before.

For long, long years I waited,
The answer still I wait,
And hear but darkly murmur
The riddling lips of fate.

When I joy in the strength of morning,
And feel that life is good—
Lo, right athwart my pathway
That fateful mound in the wood.

And when I sadly question
What way beyond may lie,
A silent voice makes answer,
“Thou 'lt know all by and by.”

OUT OF THE DEPTHS.

I.

HE gives the sparrow food to still her clamoring
nest,
And stretches gentle hands to break the young
bird's fall;
But does He hear in vain the widowed mother's
call,
Nor heeds the little life starved at her withered
breast ?

I call aloud to him, the God in whom we trust;
I work till throat and eyes seem filled with burning
dust,
And my fingers are ragged and numb with the
needle's cruel thrust.
The children cry for bread, my babe can only
moan;
I have but love for it, my breast is dry as a stone.

How can I see them die when bread is to be had?
For in the eyes of night no crime looks wholly bad.

II.

I see it everywhere, the house of shame and sin:
Within were warmth and light, and music's mock-
ing din;
Beside the door one waited, a fiend to lure me in.
I paused—may God forgive the thought that
hunger bred:
An angel spake my name, and guiltily I fled.

III.

How could I see them die, when bread was to be
had?
I fled from them one night—their voices drove me
mad.
I sought the house of shame, where woman is
bought and sold,
And men, for woman's all, give only earth's dead
gold.

I sell myself for gold, I buy my children bread;

Again they laugh at play, again their cheeks are
red.
And yet I love them less, I fear their guiltless
eyes;
And seem to hear all night their low upbraiding
cries;
And something ever whispers, " Better they were
dead,
Than from the devil's hand, God's children should
be fed."

IV.

I dreamed my husband came, and called me as I
lay.
I strove to rise and go, the demons hissed me
nay;
But from their iron hold I madly broke away.
I clasped him to my heart, my lips to his I
pressed,
When, oh! the harlot's mark flashed red on brow
and breast.
He saw, and loathed my touch: " No stain was
there—not she! "
And vanished, leaving me in shame's mute agony.

V.

All night I watch the river—dark, dark, and cold
its flow:

But see, the light of heaven lies waiting there
below.

How could I see them die, when life was to be had ?
And will, in God's just eyes, the deed seem wholly
bad ?

And he whose wrong is greatest—if he will only
forgive,

Gladly my soul will go, in outer gloom to live.

L'INFERNO.

O F all that world of woe on woe,
These only in my heart I know:
Francesca's tale of love and hate;
The threefold stream of human tears,
Still gathering with the gathering years;
The souls that must forever go,
Weary and slow,
Beneath the mocking mantles' weight;
Sweet Anselm's unavailing cry
To him who watched with tearless eye
His sons before him pining die;
And last, that note of joy when earth's far light
Breaks on the poet through that nether night!

THE BATTLEFIELD.

A RUINED homestead's ghostly walls
Stare over wastes of endless gray,—
A land which knows not it is May;
A lonely quail unanswered calls,
And homeless winds forever wailing go,
Beneath a sky forever dim and low.

—Here once, they say,
Through all a long, sad summer day,
Man strove with man in battle's fray.

And lo, the wakened fancies range
Over a landscape new and strange;
A radiance as of sunrise falls
On sad, gray wastes and broken walls,
And in the wind's unmeaning woe
Are whisperings of long ago.
The scentless herb beneath my feet
Is grown to something rare and sweet,
And tenderly I pluck this lone wild rose,
That from a young heart's dust, it may be, grows.

THE LAY OF HELGI.

And Helgi went at nightfall to Dead-Man's Wood, and returned not.—*Norse Saga.*

F AIR Helgi sits in her lonely bower,
Biding the twilight's fateful hour.

Yestreen came one: "A shade I found
Sitting beside thy warrior's mound;"
And yesternight dreaming she lay,
Of a shadow beckoning her away,
And a whispered voice: "In the world of light
One hour is mine, 'twixt day and night."

Even now one comes: "The faithful steed
Of thy warrior dead, he will not feed.
Lo, with bristling mane and starting eyes,
From side to side of the court he flies;
Now pauses and fearfully stares around,
And points with quivering ears to the ground,

As if something we see not barred his way—
Now springs aside in frantic dismay.”

Fair Helgi sits in her lonely bower,
Biding the twilight’s fateful hour.

And now she marks—what nameless fear!—
How all things tell the hour is near:
Deep murmur the storm-winds far away,
Where hills grow dark beneath the day;
Huge cloud-shapes, crouched all around the land,
Rise from night’s unleashing hand;
And one great shadow, grim and dumb,
To the maiden’s bower is well-nigh come.
And, lo, as she watches the sun’s last ray
Lingering fade from the bower walls,
The shadow athwart her casement falls,
Summoning darkly the maid away;
And comes a voice: “In the world of light
This hour is mine, ’twixt day and night.”

Like a spirit she glides down the dark stair;
And maiden and steed—oh, strange, strange
pair!—
Are wending toward the waiting wood

Where the warrior's mound a year has stood.
In the wood's weird dusk, a moment there,
Pauses Helgi, tall and fair.
The withered leaves about her head—
The leaves of summer, still unshed—
Shiver like garments of the dead;
And deep in the shadows what darker shade
Motionless waits the lingering maid ?
As now, to where day dimly burns,
Backward a yearning look she turns.

Past is the twilight's one brief hour,
And winds low wail round the dark, lone bower.

BESIDE THE CHESAPEAKE.

TO J. F. C., OF CHARLOTTE HALL, MARYLAND.

FROM groves of fragrant pine and moss-draped
oak,

Where suns are ever warm and breezes soft,
My soul clasps hands with yours to-day, my friend,
Beside the wintry, storm-vexed Chesapeake.
I bless, and bless again, the happy chance
That made us inmates of that quaint old house,
Where the Patuxent widens to the sea;
Young dominies all eagerness to teach
The things ourselves had scarce, or never, learned.

I live again to-day the autumn morn,
When shivering to a sulking, sobbing fire,
I twisted rhymes to fit some new conceit.
Philosopher and poet too was I,
Yet scorning other sanguine youthful bards,
My lips that moment wreathed with pitying mirth,

At hints let fall by you, of verses made.
The strident wails of laboring violin
Came fluttering through my room, and put to flight
A flock of glorious but unruly thoughts
Which even then were settling to my will.

I strove to lure again the frightened thoughts:
They came not, but instead came visions dire
Of broken meditations, sleepless nights—
A breath of autumn air for tingling nerves!
But stealing tip-toe past your staring door,
I listened: surely twilight's hush and gloom
Had lured some spirit from its secret place
In those deep walls so full of eerie sounds!
Or could it be the slender youth, whose art,
With gentle hands, drew me unwilling in?
You understood, nor ceased, but welcomed me
With eyes whose sober hue had filled with light,
As when a slip of moon, unseen till now,
Makes sudden life in evening's pale, gray sky.

For now had music with its rapturous power
Wide open flung the portals of your soul,
Thronging with fancies, joys, and hopes
Imprisoned through a week of sunless days.

The air was thick with flying shapes of sounds:
Familiar melodies, by two's and three's,
Went masquerading past, grotesquely dight
In airy flourishes and curious strokes,
Like letters from a cunning monkish hand;
Weird echoes answered from the dusky walls
To passing bells that tinkled low and sweet,
And fairy horns that blew a slender blast
Keen as the wintry wind at whistling eaves.

Then far away the music seemed to die,
Like voices on the wind. On well-known hills
I watch the summer sunset's glory fail:
The weary teams with swinging traces pass,
Their ears pricked to the sound of opening doors,
While loudly singing troop the negroes home,
And from the well-curb dusky maidens go
With dripping burdens poised upon their heads.
Lights twinkle through the cabin walls below,
Where sound of shuffling feet will soon be heard,
And laughter, high above the banjo's twang.

On fragrant porch wide opening to the moon,
We gather, old and young alike in pairs,—
For twilight brings to all the need of love;

And one takes down a creaking violin—
The battered idol of a boyish heart—
To scrape out discords which the pitying wind
Seizes and turns to tender harmonies.

Did someone speak ? a low, sweet girlish voice,
And meant for me.—Ah no ; 't was you, my friend,
Who, ceasing, gave your darling instrument
A gentle touch, and pressed it to your cheek
In loving approbation. Through the gloom
Our kindred souls reached hands and clasped—as
now.

LIFE'S TRIUMPH.

THE grim old bards, in lore fantastic, say
That only they may feast in Odin's hall
Who fall with front to foe, as heroes fall;
But they who conquer and survive each fray
And only yield to lingering decay,—
Who win the fatal meed of bier and pall,
In Hela's dim, drear realms are gathered all.
And so, 't is not the victor's part I pray,
But ask that other triumph over fate,
That I may never know life's sad decline,
With only the last barren spoils to glean
From fields where battle's fulness late has been,
And darkness near on which no dawn can wait:
To pass amid life's fray be liefer mine.

TO A GREEK.

THE New World's sons are not less fair than
 thou,

Yet thou dost wear the olden, untaught grace
Which time can steal not from the god-like race
Who once loved beauty as we others now
Love gold,—who taught the conquering ages how
Greece still was gods' and muses' dwelling-place.

5

NO CHARITY IN LOVE.

THE beggar heart,
When saddest, most forlorn,
Does charity of love
And sympathy most scorn.

DAWN AND THE PEAK.

HIGH over all one huge peak stands,
Flinging his Titan hands
To grasp the vale, a glowing cup,
And to the morning holds it up;
Then leaning its lips to the river's edge,
Pours to the sun earth's sacred pledge.

TWILIGHT.

A LOST lamb from the meadows crying,
A lone bird through the shadows flying,—
Tears gathering for the day that 's dead,—
A weeping heart that wills not to be comforted.

WAITING.

“ On her last day, she imagined that her son lost in the war had come again.”—*From an old letter.*

I.

O H, calm, sweet autumn morn,
Of earth not born,
But from the eternal Sabbath sent
To make the heaven-drawn soul content!
Love, move me away from the blazing hearth,
To gaze once more on the dear old earth—
The dear, kind earth and thy strong, true face,
Shall I long for them in that other place ?

No need of the hearthstone's kindly ray,
And caressing touch of thy faithful hands,
To rouse the weary blood into play.
See, warm on the threshold the sunshine stands,
Beckoning me to its sweet embrace;

And round the door the light winds race,
Gathering the leaves to their last, still place.

II.

Long years it was we lived alone,
Yet God, in his mercy, would atone,
And he, our late-born babe was sent:
An angel, he seemed, in banishment!
God's pity forgive, if we deified
The gift that was so long denied.
But the fear was with me night and day,
Lest the hand that gave, would take him away.
And oft would I wake in nameless dread,
And watch till morning by his bed.

III.

Turn me to see my last sunset!
Lo, day and night in the clouds are met,
And fiercely contend;
But the fiery, passionate light of day
Is slowly burning to quiet gray.
Gone, too, are the struggle and pain,

And soft as the day my life shall end—
If only our darling may come again.

And he will come, I know,
Though coldly, wildly the night winds blow.
I can mark the steps of the blast
By the sobbing, frantic train
Of the dead leaves hurrying past.
How they flutter against the pane!
Poor wandering spirits of summer and light,
Lost in the storm of winter and night!
Or are they souls of the dead set free,
That beckon and call to me ?

He was so young when he went away,—
But could I bid him stay ?
And fetter his spirit proud
Forever to mine ?
In these narrow walls he would droop and pine:
The eagle must turn to the cliff and the cloud.

Sad was the land, though the month was May,
When the summons came, and he went away.
I saw him last as he paused awhile,

Gazing back from the hill-top stile;
But ever I seemed to hear his call,
And again at the door, his light footfall;
And when loud on the roof are wind and rain,
All night I watch, with the light at the pane.
But the light grows dim, and I watch in vain.

'Twas a dream, a dream!
See my darling there,
Asleep, with the gleam
On his golden hair,
And his little arms all round and bare.
Hush, hush! Why weep?
You have broken his sleep . . .

THE COCOON.

WE found it in the autumn woods
And bore it home, the strange cocoon,
To keep it with the secret hope
That when the hidden life should ope,
Dear God would grant the one sweet boon
Which each in voiceless prayer would name—
Nor name aloud for blissful shame.

We placed it in a hidden nook,
And guarded it with jealous care,
And thought that winter did us wrong
To keep us from our own so long.
We were a foolish, loving pair
Who still would blush in blissful shame
To speak of joys we soon might claim.

A startling shape of golden light
Burst from the strange cocoon one night,

And fluttered through the open door,
Just ere the dark-winged angel bore
God's gift to God's own hand again.—

Oh, little life not lived in vain!
Thy one sweet day my soul counts gain
Above these after-years of pain.

And still with silent lips we name
The boon we nevermore may claim.

LIFE'S ROSES.

WHO gathers the rose for the rose's sake ?
'T were better to let it be.

When young, we gather the buds of hope;
When old, the blossoms of memory.

YOUNG CLIFFORD'S BRIDE.

I.

NOW youths and maidens, with jest and song,
From every lane and pathway throng,
For the land is fair and the month is May,
And Clifford weds fair Helen to-day.

“ The last of the Cliffords weds to-day,”
Two crones by the wayside, whispering, say;
“ Heaven send the gentle maiden grace!
For she is fair and her bridegroom brave
And both are young, but it may not save
From the curse of all who wed his race.”

II.

Late cheer they keep in Clifford Hall;
And still the guests are lingering all,
Though feast is over and dances done,

And lights are fading one by one
Where night and morning are well-nigh met.
Does he the bridegroom linger yet ?
And her laughing maidens from his side
Two hours ago bore the blushing bride.
And a silence falls, like the hush of song
In groves where a shadow glides along;
And the bridegroom leaves unsaid the jest,
For, 'mid the faces that round him throng,
Was it some strange unbidden guest ?

III.

Like some fair dove around her nest,
Does Helen still, with fluttering breast,
Alone, in sweetest maiden dread,
Hover about her bridal bed.

Music she hears and voices hum
Far off, and from the garden wall
A waking bird's lone, plaintive call.
But, hush, what other sounds that come
From that still chamber overhead
Where rest the relics of the dead ?
On stair and hall what low, swift tread ?

The door has oped a little space,
And, lo, a shape with veiled face!

It draws anear, no word it says,
But holds to Helen's wondering gaze
A mirror quaint and small, and bound
With many a mystic figure round,—
Heirloom of Clifford's fated race,
But long unmoved from its secret place.
And comes a voice, so strange, so low,
If voice it be, one may not know,—
Murmurs of inarticulate woe.
And listening, gazing, Helen seems
Like one who struggles with fearful dreams.—

They found her, Clifford's fair young bride,
Lifeless her virgin couch beside;
And near her, broken amidst, there lay
A mirror, quaint and old, they say—
Meaningless, mute, its tarnished gray.

“ONE COME FROM THE DEAD.”

I N childhood would I read thy story o'er,
And wonder at the strange things therein told;
I wonder now tho' I am growing old,
And read with youth's credulity no more.
Grieved not thy soul when called from that bright
shore
To enter once more in its mortal mould,
As when from sunlight to his dungeon cold
The slave returns and dons the gyves he wore?
Or did thy spirit even in Heaven yearn
To comfort those dear ones who mourned thee
dead,
And gladly to their faithful love return?
Didst thou the mystery of mysteries learn?
Or start, as one who dreaming wakes in dread,
To find the cold death-clothes about thy head?

THE WIND AND THE WIRES

STRANGE harp! with eerie murmurings
The wind plays o'er these restless strings;
As if it heard and understood,
And strove to tell, with varying breath,
The messages of life and death
That noiseless flit through this lone wood.

THE GOLDEN-ROD.

A TRIFLE, love, I send you here,—
The earliest spray of golden-rod;
A trifle that makes me worthier you,
Worthier heaven and God.

You remember the day we had wandered where
The river takes in his sliding arms
The retiring hills which were putting on
The autumn's tender charms?

And you silently gathered the golden-rod
Which my woodland ways unheeded bore;
And the little flower I now beheld
With eyes that were blind before.

O cruel one, can you longer doubt
The love that is more than love to me?
Has taught me the good of life to know,
The beautiful to see.

A MEMORY.

To ——

AS far out on the fickle, faithless deep,
Where guiding winds and drifting currents
fail,
And languid calm and burning suns prevail,
Nerveless at mast and helm the sailors sleep;
But now low moanings round the mast-head creep,
And rises with unfolding wings each sail;
Anon with shout and song the mariners hail
The waking winds, and on their way they keep
To fragrant airs that tell where land must be.
So, when the motions of my life are still,
When listless at life's helm reclines the will,
Something of thee—a word, a look—is brought
Out of the mystic depths of memory,
To waft me o'er the weary wastes of thought.

TRANSFORMATION.

ALL night a shadow motionless lay,
Glooming over the gates of day;
But, with darkness slow withdrawn,
It gathered radiance, and, behold,
It grew a seraph tressed in gold,
Pointing a rosy hand toward the dawn.

WITHIN THE GATES.

SOMETIMES amid the city's keen, unmirthful
cries,
Which others heed not, or despise,—
The pitiless-mingled din
Of those who lose and those who win—
Tears for some nameless grief will rise.

WITHOUT THE GATES.

MORE blest is he who idle waits
Without the city's thronging gates,—
Hearing unmoved the far, sad din,—
Than he who proves that fruitless life within

LILIAN.

“ Quanti dolci pensier, quanto disio
Meno costoro al doloroso passo.”
—*L'Inferno*.

I.

THIS is the grave, that holds my living dead.
I fear it in the noon's full, pitiless glare,
For then 'tis but a heap of cold, still earth;
But when midnight slow brings the hour once more,
Hither I come, and win her from the dead,
And till the dawn we live our life again.

I did her wrong to love and make her mine,
Though nature meant her not for other's love;
Nor fate, that drove me hither over sea.
For while my heart yet knew not its own way,
The passing fancy of a passionate day
Bound me in vows which still in riper years

I might not break, for fear of wrong and shame;
Until at last, fleeing the death-in-life,
I came a wanderer to this far land.

The simple folk, untutored in distrust
Of stranger guest, made wide their willing doors,
And to their humble ways I shaped my life,
With the wild ardor and large sense of joy
Which sudden freedom brought a mind half-crazed,
From ever brooding on one tyrannous thought.

But still at times would fits of madness come
And drive me from the ways and homes of men,
To wander far among the lonely hills.

At noon beside a mountain brook I lay,
And gazed upon a flower plucked and torn,
With the unheeding earnestness of one
Whose soul is busy with some torturing thought,
Nor guides the aimless motions of the hands,—
When over my being flashed the subtle thrill
Warning me of a human presence near.
I turned and saw above me from the rocks
A maiden leaning, clothed in purest white,
And gazing on me with sad, pitying eyes.

Was it a dream ? Or waking vision ?—such
As though noon's flying perfumes, airs, and lights
Should merge and take the shape of maiden fair.
A moment—and I lay as one who wakes
And sees the shadow of a blissful dream
Just fading into morning's hateful light.
Long time I waited—would it come again ?—
Till hilltops pointed dumbly toward the east
Dark hands that warned me of the coming night.

But wild, unheeding steps led me amiss,
And lost within a maze of glooming heights,
I paused and called; and stranger than the voice
Wherewith the hills did answer, seemed my own.
Another voice came from the rocks above;
A crook was waved; and drawing near I found
A shepherd, burly, huge; and by his side—
As if the moon looked round a wooded height—
Clad all in white, a slender maiden stood.
Silent and wondering awhile I gazed,
Then murmured broken words of “night” and
“lost.”

Distress did never need interpreter,
Though in a tongue unknown and harsh it plead.
To one deep-chested call sent through the hills,—

Each rock and coppice starting into life,—
A fleecy host came bleating to our side;
And winding in and out by cliff and glen,
The shepherd led the way, with friendly signs,
To where, beneath, his cottage window shone.

II.

“ To-day the shepherds all make holiday,
The noble signor, would he stay the feast ? ”
My hostess prayed next morn, as lingering still,
I motioned to depart, with broken thanks.
So with the shepherd I abode that day,
And still the next; then yielding to the voice
Urging me, “ Here is peace—why further seek ? ”
And lured by something like a new-born joy
That kindled in the maiden’s artless glance,
And made faint sunlight in my vacant heart,
I claimed and found a daily welcome here.

Lilian I called her in my foreign tongue,
The maid so gentle, beautiful, and pure,
Her being seemed a freak of those strange powers
That move in scorn of nature’s open laws,
And from the loves of pale, sad womanhood
And manhood coarse and large, had shaped a life

Which to the parent blood such kinship bore
As fragrant woodland flower bears to the earth.

And wholly nature's child the maiden seemed.
Skilled in that mystic lore unlearned of men,
She knew the haunts and ways of bird and beast;
Of flowers, where they grew, and what strange
power
And darker meaning in their colors hid:
So quick to read the secret things of earth,
Her large dark eyes at times made me afraid.

Hers seemed the eyes that watched me from the
ledge;
And questioned later, laughing she confessed
How leaving thirsty flocks knee-deep in stream,
She let the woodland flowers—love's wonted trick—
Guide her at fragrant will among the cliffs;
So, startled, found me wrapped in thought,
And felt a maiden's pity straightway spring
For one who seemed too young to be so sad.

Henceforth her life was mine among the hills.
With morning's dewy call from topmost peak,
We drove our flocks aloft as gay as they;

Or in the dusky coolness of a grot,
The maiden with her panting charge around
Would lend the charm of moonlit nights to noon,
With faëry lore and tales of long ago;
Or from one book we read, my harsher speech—
What wonder?—soon forgotten for her own.
And many an evening did we watch the sun
Break on some jagged peak his disk of gold,
And turn away, sighing we knew not why,
Each wondering if the other guessed of thoughts
Revealed in tender glances quick withdrawn;
Then half in sadness home would silent go,—
All merging to the perfect summer night,
When, heedless of the gloomy, warning shape
Which ever seemed to thrust her from my side,
I claimed and found her virgin love my own
And earth, which paused, in mute expectancy
To listen to my eager, broken voice,
Rejoicing broke into a flood of light,
As when one starting wakes from wintry dreams
To find the April sunlight in his eyes,
And in his ears the peal of Easter bells.
The moon hung lingering just above the trees,
The valleys flung aloft their silver haze,
And on from height to height low voices ran.

But with the morrow, like the lingering fumes
Of some mad drink, came memory of the night
And all my life before, to darken thought.
With shy, sweet glances Lilian greeted me,—
Wild, timid bird lured to my breast last eve,
Now fluttering coyly at the half-closed door,
And waiting still the look and outstretched hand;
These wanting, flew away in sudden fear.
I found her weeping in our favorite nook,
And long must woo to win again her trust.

“What is it changes you?” she sadly asked.
“Once, long ago, I watched a fisherman
Plunging his spear at random in the lake,
When, lo, a woman’s ghastly face shot up,
And flashed a horror through the peaceful scene.
So, often will some thoughtless word of mine
Raise up a shadowy something in your eyes,
And then I fear that you would do me wrong;”
And Lilian, speaking wiser than she knew,
Turned innocent, deep-searching eyes on mine.

I cheered her as I might, with kiss and vow,
Yet dare not tell her of that other life,
Still hoping love could make amends for wrong.

III.

“ I watch the flocks upon the hills to-night,”
Old Pietro said at eve; and shook his head,
Telling of strange things seen and heard last night.
As often as he slept, mysterious hands
Would tap a ghostly summons on the pane,
And something ever stirred about the house,
And shook the doors—and yet, the wind was still.
And then his dogs, which nothing could affright,
At midnight, leaving watch beside the folds,
Came whining to the door, and cowering lay,
Or drearily howled as when they see the dead;
Nor could be quieted with word or blow.
The sheep, poor timid things, were wild with fear,
And fled about the folds, or huddling stood,
Answering his well-known call with piteous bleat.
To-day he found a lamb still warm in death,
Unmarked by sign of violence or disease.
And yet, no lamb was missing from the folds.
Some evil, surely, was about to fall;
For just two years ago, when on his flocks
Had come the plague, he found a lamb this way.
And Lilian’s eyes grew darker while he spoke,
As when a cloud drowns all the vales in shade.

The father went; and in the bower we loved,
Long time, hand clasped in hand, silent we sat.
Then Lilian drawing nearer, in low voice—
Fearing to speak of things in secret feared,—
Told of the troublous night herself had known.

“ I`dreamed, together here we sat as now,
And while I whispered thee of wedding day,
And all the little things a woman loves,
A burst of hollow, mocking laughter came,
And, lo, a shadow stood between us; and I woke.

“ Again I dreamed: it was our marriage morn,
And merrily rang the village bells below;
Along the way the trees broke into bloom,
Shaking their fragrant blessings on our head;
And when we passed into the holy place,
The organ, of itself, began to play.
But as the good priest spoke the mystic words
That were to make us of one flesh, one soul,
The roses on my breast to ashes turned,
And died the music to a hollow knell.
I woke, my forehead cold with drops of fear,
And long knew not whether I waked or dreamed.

“ Some evil must there be; then let us go,
Ere yet the evil fall, and cast ourselves
Together at the Holy Mother’s feet.
Her light burns ever at her shrine below,
And in the night our prayers she best can hear.”

In vain I strove to jest away her fears,
Nor yet might win the maiden from her wish;
Then half in anger, answered rudely—nay.

“ Such words from thee ? ”—and low and strange
her voice.

“ But well I knew thou wouldst not be unkind.
Oh, love, why not be strong and tell me all ?—
For surely something yet remains untold—
Why dost thou fear to go with me to-night ?
And why, when I would talk, as maidens will,
Of wedding day, and how it all must be,
The little joys of gown and guest and feast,
Or, bolder, whisper of the sweet new life,
Dost turn away and sigh, or darkly frown ? ”

Then darkness lent me strength to tell her all;
How love had struggled in my heart with right,
And low I ended: “ Together once we read

In Dante's book divine, of those two souls
Who, still tormented by the driving blast,
Could make the story of their guilty love
So sweet and sad. Shuddering I closed the book,
But thou didst answer from thy innocent heart,
'Is love so sweet, even though to love be sin?'
Oh Lilian, can it be?—I love thee well—
Shall love or right have way?''

She answered not,
But from her startled eyes keenly I felt
Strike through my soul, the woman's grief and
shame;
And springing past my outstretched arms, she fled.

With straining eyes I watched the rising moon
Silver with ghostly light a withered tree,
Shaping from bough and trunk a crucifix,
Whereon a shadowy figure writhing hung.
And while my life came back as in a dream,
Calmly I waited for the doom to fall.

A tremulous voice came from the darkness near—
The mother, breathless all in haste and dread.
Was Lilian with me? for just now she saw
Flash past the door, a something robed in white,

That glimmered in the tortuous way awhile,
But when she breathed a prayer, had vanished
straight.

I answered not, but started up and plunged
Down the steep way, dreading I knew not what.
Bleeding and breathless to the lake I came,
And saw below the fisherman cast his net,
And heard the great, calm whisper of the waves.
“ Too good, too pure, for such an end,” I said,
And straightway came the memory of her wish
To pray at the cathedral shrine that night.
Above, against the sky, rose grim and dark its walls,
Their bases deep beneath the hill and lake—
A heathen temple once, tradition said,
Where human victims reconciled the gods.
An awful gloom came from the failing moon,
Whose fulness had beheld our plighted love;
A phantom shape now stretching scorpion arms,
And blotting out the kindly light of stars.
With hollow sound the graves rang to my tread;
A taper burned before the Mother’s shrine,
And through the doubtful glow I saw her there,
The maiden, fallen across the altar steps.
My rapturous cry startled the ghosts of sound

That slumbered in the walls; and reverently,
As one might raise the image of a saint
Flung down by impious hands, I took her up,
And saw the dark life-drops fallen from her lips
Upon the stone. I feared to look again,
And in her trembling bosom veiled my sight,
To hide me from the shadow waiting there;
And closer to my heart I clasped the maiden,
Praying that God would save her from her doom.

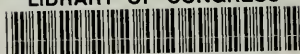
“ Fear not,” she said; “ no harm can reach us here,
For, see, the holy saints keep watch around,
And over all the Mother and her babe.
How often have I dreamed, when here I knelt,
Of that dear time when I, a mother too,
Could claim her mother’s blessing on my child—
Thy child and mine. But so it may not be,
And I must die. So well I love thee still
That I must die, to save my soul from death.
Think not I feared thee when I fled to-night;
For well I know thou wouldst not do me wrong.
Myself I feared—the woman in my heart.
Death is the only way: it seemed so hard
To go back to the other little life
And all that, ere thy coming, was so good.—

How dark it grows! Bend lower thy dear face
That I may touch it with my own again,
And kiss again the lips I thought were mine.
Alas, almost I wish that I might live."

VIRGINIA: AFTER-THOUGHT.

DEAR land of many streams and mighty hills,—
And dear wherever glory lives, thy name,
Though latter years may link it with their shame,—
To-day my wanderer's heart with longing fills
To track the Shenandoah's parent rills
Once more; to watch again the sunset's flame
Beyond the Alleghanies die; or claim
Companionship with the night-wind that shrills
Round Otter's lonely peak.—Why should we weep
O'er glory past? Still stands—shall ever stand—
Unchanged, unchangeable, each mighty steep,
And vale and stream their olden beauty keep—
Sure witnesses from the creator's hand
Of favoring love to thee, my own dear land.

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